1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

FOLK LIFE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

Notions connected with life and death are, on the whole, mixed up with religion. To die on holy days, such as Fridays or in the month of Ramadan, is a sign of God's blessing.

Sanctity shows itself also in status and rank and their role in the community. According to the villagers, the 'ashraf' (people of distinguished descent being related to the Prophet) have a better chance of salvation than others, a notion which, of course, satisfies the villagers' ego as they consider themselves descendants of the Prophet. The persistence of the religious prerogatives of the 'ashraf' goes to show that the central conception of Islam in the equality of all believers has not entirely supplanted the Arab reverence for distinguished genealogy.

The villagers' attitude of respect for religious men is based on two principles. The first is that of knowledge of Koranic studies, combined with observation of religious duties; the second is derived from hereditary piety, as recognized piety is believed to be handed from father to son. The example of the two pious men acknowledged and venerated as such by the villagers is perhaps the best illustration. One of these two pious sheikhs is the son of the villagers' deceased saint around whose shrine the tombs of the villagers' cemetery is spread. As this sheikh does not live in the village, he frequently comes to it either for an ordinary visit, for taking part in settling serious disputes between individuals or families, or to collect his annual custom of crops offered to him by the villagers during harvest time. During his stay he moves from one guest house to another as the guest of a clan or a family which endeavours to provide hospitality for him and thus win his approval. In return, the sheikh is requested to write charms, or to bless water, or to read over a sick person, and thus secure his 'baraka'.[1]

The piety of the other religious man is based also on the fact that he is the grandson of a man who was one of the favourite disciples of the chief founder of the Nakshbadia mystic sect. His grandfather is reputed to have done miraculous deeds and had composed mystic verses usually recited amongst the members of the sect. His piety is also based on the grounds that he studied at al-Azhar Mosque and thus he is considered to be well versed in Koranic studies. It was because of his piety that he gained most of the votes in Silwa, when he stood as a candidate for the Parliament as mentioned earlier.

It is also recognized that people who know the sacred book by heart should be venerated as the carriers of knowledge, and many people regard them as possessed of 'baraka'. In Arab councils, religious men are always included, and their decisions are usually respected.

Moreover, the main events of life and death have their religious significance or at least their sanction. It is in the Prophet's tradition to celebrate the naming ceremony, to circumcise children, and to get them married.

[1] This sheikh died during my field work and a delegation from the village went to his village in condolence.

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
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Upper Egypt

586 at reconciliation, has always to give effect to the expressed wish of the husband. The wife also can press for a divorce, and is not, therefore, devoid of all rights; but in this case, besides losing her maintenance, she also, as a rule, loses the [583] jointure that would otherwise fall to be paid to her by the husband as stipulated in the marriage contract. The divorce cannot be judicially forced from the husband, he must say the words "Thou art repudiated," and if he will not do so he has to give his wife a *bêt shêr 'ai*, that is, a separate dwelling and maintenance; it is a kind of divorce *a mensâ et thoro*. During the continuance of this relationship the woman can- [587] not marry again, though of course the husband can. But during the proceedings, with which a multitude of laymen, both summoned and unsummoned, mix themselves up, the husband often becomes morally pliant, or is induced by cunning to utter the words, whereupon the case at once comes to an end. The phrase "thou art repudiated" is fatally momentous, the mere utterance of it, even in the heat of a quarrel, results in separation, and "thrice repudiated" even in complete divorce (see below). If a person writes these words down and in joke asks a Mohammedan to read them, he absolutely refuses to read them aloud. The asseveration "by repudiation," or stronger "by threefold repudiation," is equivalent to a solemn oath. The greater number of disputes in cases of matrimonial separation arise on account of the children, whom neither the father nor mother would like to part with. They, together with the matter of expense, are what unites most closely the bonds of marriage, otherwise so loose. Up to a certain age, which differs among the various so-called sects of Mohammedans—among the Hana- ●[595] fites, for instance, being the seventh year, among the Shafaites the second—the child remains with its mother, while the father pays for its support, and in return has the right of seeing it as often as he wishes. Henceforth the father, if he has satisfactorily supported it hitherto, can take the child altogether to himself, and he usually does so if it is a boy.

[587] The divorced wife returns to her parents, who generally soon succeed in finding another settlement for her. In a